



## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# News Release

*Pacific Islands External Affairs Office*

300 Ala Moana Blvd., Room 5-311 Box 50187, Honolulu, HI 96850  
Phone: 808 792-9530 Fax: 808 792-9583

For Release: September 12, 2006  
Contact: Ken Foote, 808 792 9535 or 282 9442

PIEA-06-22  
RO-06-097

### **Critical Habitat Designated for Rota Bridled White-eye**

*Majority of Critical Habitat on Government Lands*

A final rule designating critical habitat for the endangered Rota bridled white-eye on the island of Rota in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands was released today by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The final designation consists of 3,700 acres of government land under the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and 258 acres of private land.

Rota bridled white-eye critical habitat was determined by using the best scientific and commercial data available. Information included peer-reviewed scientific publications, Service listing and recovery documents, unpublished reports from the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Division of Fish and Wildlife, aerial photographs and satellite imagery, and personal communications with local scientists and resource managers. All comments were considered in the final designation of critical habitat.

On May 20, 2004, a lawsuit was filed against the Department of the Interior and the Service by the Center for Biological Diversity challenging to the decision not to propose critical habitat for the Rota bridled white-eye. This critical habitat designation fulfills a September 14, 2004, settlement agreement stating that a critical habitat proposal must be submitted by September 7, 2005, to the *Federal Register* for publication.

Critical habitat is a term in the ESA. It identifies specific geographic areas that contain features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and which may require special management considerations. The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve, or other special conservation area. It does not allow government or public access to private lands. However, federal agencies that undertake, fund or permit activities that may affect critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure such actions do not adversely modify or destroy designated critical habitat.

In 30 years of implementing the ESA, the Service has found the designation of critical habitat provides little additional protection for most listed species, while preventing the agency from using scarce conservation resources for activities with greater conservation benefits.

- more -

In almost all cases, recovery of listed species will come through voluntary cooperative partnerships, not regulatory measures such as critical habitat. Habitat is also protected through cooperative measures under the ESA, including Habitat Conservation Plans, Safe Harbor Agreements, Candidate Conservation Agreements and state programs. In addition, voluntary partnership programs such as the Service's Private Stewardship Grants and the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program also restore habitat. Habitat for listed species is provided on many of the Service's National Wildlife Refuges, and state wildlife management areas.

The Rota bridled white-eye is a small (approximately 4 inches in size) yellowish bird with a yellow-orange bill, legs, and feet. Average weight of the bird is about one-third of an ounce. The species feeds primarily on insects and often is found in small flocks of five to seven birds. Related species include the Guam bridled white-eye, which is believed to be extinct, and the Saipan bridled white-eye, which is relatively abundant on Saipan, Tinian, and Aguigan. In 1982, there were approximately 10,000 Rota bridled white-eyes. Currently, the species consists of approximately 1,000 birds restricted to forests above 490 feet (150 meters) elevation in the Sabana region of Rota.

The final rule to designate critical habitat for the Rota bridled white-eye was published today in the *Federal Register* and will take effect in 30 days. The final rule, which contains maps of specific critical habitat locations, is available at <http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/01jan20061800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2006/pdf/06-7583.pdf>. Copies may also be obtained by calling the Fish and Wildlife Service's Honolulu office at 808 792 9400.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the nearly 100-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.